

Watercolour basics

Suggestions for a Basic Kit to get you Started.

The Paint Box.

Watercolours come in little tablets called “pans” and “half-pans” and also in tubes. I would suggest a box of 12 or 16 half-pans to start with. As you progress you will find that you favour some colours more than others as you begin to develop your own style. Naturally as you use the favourite colours more often, the pans will need replacing - better still you can then buy tubes of these colours and squeeze the colour into the empty pan. This topping up works well and means you only buy colours as you need them. Some online stores will sell empty boxes (they're not cheap!) this means you can buy a box and choose your own colours. Alternatively buy a ready made up box and replace some of the colours you don't like or will never use. I always wonder why the manufacturers always include a white which any self-respecting watercolour artist would never use and a black which again is very rarely used by watercolour painters

I would suggest buying the better quality paints these are called “artists' quality” they mix better, have stronger pigments and are more light-fast. The alternative are known as “student colours” (or sometimes “Cotman colours”) it is false economy to begin with these and harder to learn the techniques of say, laying -in a wash or mixing wet-into-wet.

The Colours.

There is no right and wrong about which colours to use, but like the best parties good mixers are essential! After considerable soul-searching, research, and changes of mind over the years, I settled on the following selection of “warm” and “cool” colours;

My favoured warm colours are: Cobalt Blue, French Ultramarine*, Sap Green*, Burnt Sienna, Yellow Ochre*, Cadmium Yellow, Cadmium Red and Permanent Magenta.

My favoured cool colours are: Indian Red*, Alizarin Crimson*, Aureolin, Burnt Umber*, Sepia, Cerulean Blue, Indigo.

The ones with an * are the six starter colours I should choose if pressed!

Every Artist favours different colours and I have yet to find two art books where the artists have chosen exactly the same starter colours. At the end of the day it is trial and error, experience, and personal choice - but you wouldn't go far wrong with the above selection!

Brushes

Brushes come in many sizes and makes and you can spend a fortune on them! Again the better the brush the better the service you will get from it, and the better the variety of line you will produce. Brushes are the most important tools in your box so buy a reasonable quality and always look after them by cleaning them when you have finished and storing them so the bristles don't get bent.

Sable brushes are the best for watercolour, sizes range from 00 to 12 in most ranges and you will be able to tackle most pictures with a size 10 round, 8 round, & 5 round. Be careful you don't go for small brushes too early as these are really for detail only, the bigger the brush the more colour it will hold and the easier it will be to produce good and even washes. Proline brushes are the next level down but don't hold anything like the same amount of water/pigment.

Other Equipment

H.B. and 2B pencils. use a knife ideally to sharpen your pencils as you can achieve a better quality of shape for the drawing edge. A pencil sharpener is the obvious (but not as satisfactory) alternative.

A putty rubber (this is a special eraser for watercolour paper as it doesn't affect the surface of the paper).

Masking tape. for fixing your paper to the board and creating sharp edges to your work if you wish.

A mixing palette buy a ceramic palette as the plastic ones do not help colours to mix evenly or pool as well. One with 5 to 6 colour holders is fine.

If you are working at home **a plywood board** about 50cm x 75cm is ideal propped up on a couple of books. Easels are very rarely used in watercolour painting as you want your colours to run at a gradual pace and not vertically down the moment you apply them!

If you are working outside just use your sketchbook on your lap at first.

A Sketchbook A5 Size, nothing too ambitious at first! **Not** Cartridge paper though it is too thin. Sketchbooks come in many sizes and shapes, but choose one which calls itself a watercolour sketchbook as the paper in it will be a heavier weight and therefore take watercolour without cockling (*cockling is a term for when a piece of paper absorbs water and starts to bubble up and buckle losing its flat shape*).

Paper

Clearly you will need more paper than just a sketchbook for when you start to work on larger pictures... however such is the variety and detail of information needed concerning the selection of paper I am not addressing it here other than to say pick the size you want and choose a **Cold Pressed** (sometimes called "NOT" paper at least **300gsm/140lb** in weight. this is an ideal paper to start with.

...**And a bag to carry it all in**....and you are ready to go and make a name for yourself in the world of watercolour painting.

Just a last thought....

Do not buy one of the boxed watercolour painters' kits, invariably they contain inferior materials that manufacturers just want to offload onto an unsuspecting public!

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